

THE THREE KEYS

By FREDERIC ORMOND

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Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

Morris Lathrop, having squandered \$2,000,000, resolves to kill himself. He changes his mind when he is told by George Trevor, father of his betrothed, Clara Trevor, that a loan of \$500,000 is necessary to save Trevor from ruin. Lathrop runs across Jack Millington, a rich young Wall Street broker, and Millington asks Lathrop to look after his affairs while he is on a visit to Chicago. With one of the keys with which he is intrusted Lathrop opens Millington's safe deposit box, takes \$150,000 in securities and turns them over to Trevor. Lathrop finds Sam Millington, father of Jack, is the enemy who forced Trevor to the verge of ruin. At his apartment Rita Ortega awaits him, and Edna Trevor, sister of his fiancée, finds her there. At the Trevor home, to his surprise, he finds Jack Millington. Jack Millington, who has been called back to New York, pleads with Lathrop and Trevor to be in on the big copper deal that has ruined the latter. Millington is introduced to Rita Ortega.

CHAPTER IX (Continued).

"THE evening before last, Mr. Chapman called here," Edna announced. "You know, he has been here once or twice with Mr. Cortright. Well, this time he came alone, and I only wished he had stayed away. I don't know how it happened, but before he went, he mentioned having seen you at the Waldorf and other places several times this week with a lady whom he described so perfectly that there was no mistaking her; Clara recognized her at once."

"How could she do that?" Lathrop was genuinely amazed.

"Oh! Edna exclaimed. 'Didn't I tell you that the anonymous letter contained a photograph of Miss Ortega? Well, it did, and a good one, too.'"

"What more, Edna?" Lathrop's voice came weakly now.

"Nothing more, only, Clara has been in ever since. It was the last straw. I think if you had come around sooner, it would have been all right, but you remained away so long that she had to send for you, and now—"

She paused suddenly, staring in the direction of the door.

Lathrop, turning to discover what it was that had arrested her speech, perceived Clara, who had entered the room unheeded, and now stood motionless, gazing upon her lover and her sister with scornful eyes. Even in his perturbation of the moment, Lathrop was stirred to wonder at her behavior. Her usual composure and delicate loveliness, her own mood of indignation had caused her to assume unconsciously a pose of true earnestness, which displayed the slender elegance of her form to its full perfection. Her angry pride was evident in the haughty pose of her head, in the darkening violet of her eyes.

"It seems, Morris, that my sister has anticipated me," she said, coldly. "I heard only the last sentence of your conversation, and now I am here. If you will excuse me, I should like to talk with Morris alone for a little."

She did not speak again until Edna had left the room. Then she turned at once and confronted her fiancée.

"Morris," she demanded, "I am sure you have not been to see me?" And she added, unflatteringly: "Is there a greater attraction somewhere else?"

"I have been very busy," Lathrop replied, with some embarrassment. "With two exceptions I have not been out of my rooms an evening since I was here."

"That is an answer to only one of my questions," Clara retorted. "There was a hint of bitterness now in her voice. Lathrop frowned.

"The other question needs no answer from me," he said, firmly. "You should not have asked it."

"Perhaps not," his betrothed admitted, with a weak smile. "Nevertheless, I have asked it." She sighed heavily and hesitated a moment. Then, with straight-forward frankness, she demanded: "Will you tell me about Miss Ortega? There is such a person, I believe."

"Yes," Lathrop said. "The reluctance in his voice was plainly manifest. "Will you tell me about her?" Clara persisted.

"I am not at liberty to tell you much concerning her," was the reply.

A deeper red flamed in the cheeks of the girl at her lover's reticence, and her eyes flashed ominously.

"Not much you can tell me!" she repeated, slowly. "Morris, I do not understand what you mean. Is it, perhaps, that this is not a fit subject for us to discuss?"

"God forbid!" Lathrop exclaimed, agitated at the implied taunt. "You must not wrong Clara that way. Clara, indeed, she only came here to make Edna, your sister, come—just as innocently. It is most unfortunate that you should have come to know of her existence at this time. I had intended soon to ask you to call upon her. Surely, surely, Clara, you cannot doubt me."

CHAPTER X.

The Broken Engagement.

CARLA TREVOR did not at once reply to the question that Lathrop asked. Instead, she kept her eyes fixed upon her lover's face, in the meantime turning her engagement ring on her finger, as though it had something to do with the character of her thoughts. There was no anger in her voice or eyes, but suffering was manifest in both. At last, she answered him.

"Just so long as this ring remains upon my finger I will not doubt you. Still, believe that you owe me some sort of an explanation. I would not have you think me jealous, for I could not permit our relations to continue if there existed any cause for such an emotion. But I shall ask you one question: Does there exist such a cause?"

"No, Clara, there does not," Lathrop answered, with emphasis.

The girl hesitated again for a moment; then she quickly extended a photograph toward him.

"Is that Miss Ortega?" she asked.

"Yes," was the answer.

"That picture came in a letter I received concerning her—and you?"

"Edna told me about it," Lathrop said, as she paused. "I believe that this picture was stolen from her parlor while she was locked in another room."

In her apartment, to which she had fled to escape the man who forced his way into her presence. He must have taken it at that time. I can account for his possession of it in no other way."

"Then you know who wrote the anonymous letter?" Clara exclaimed.

"Certainly! It was written, doubtless, by the man who called upon you later—Chapman. Shall I tell you the story?"

"No, it is unnecessary that you should," the girl answered. "Tell me, rather, about Miss Ortega. What relation does she bear to you?"

"She is, in a sense, my ward," Lathrop made the statement with evident reluctance. "I shall tell you all that it is permitted me to tell, at the present time. For the rest, you must have faith in me, dearest."

"Faith is spontaneous, Morris," the girl retorted. "It cannot be compelled by the will. As for that, I have faith in you. At least, I think I have. I know that I do not wish to lose it. Whether I am to do so or not rests with you."

"At present," was the answer, "she has no one besides myself."

"No one besides yourself?" Clara repeated incredulously. "Then, pray, what is your relation to her? You have charge of her fortune, perhaps? For she has an income of her own, I suppose."

"She has an income—yes," Lathrop declared bluntly.

"Something in the manner of the young man's reply provoked his fiancée's suspicion. 'Who provides that income?' she inquired, crisply. 'Is it you, Morris?'"

"She believes I am to do so from property left to her by her father," was the evasion.

"But the girl refused to be content by this indirectness. 'How, Morris?' she said, gravely persistent, 'is this income of Miss Ortega's really paid to her out of money provided for that purpose by you?'"

Before such tenacity of purpose Lathrop found himself helpless, and he bowed his head in assent. Afterward, for a little time, there was silence between the two. But presently the lover spoke again, softly, pleadingly.

"Clara, is it necessary to go into these details?"

"The answer was rigidly uncompromising. 'I regard it as quite necessary. Will you tell me how long this condition of things has existed?'"

"For several years—about four. If you will listen, I will tell you all that can be told now."

The obligation came to me in a strange manner, and I accepted a duty, fully realizing what I was undertaking, but convinced there was no other course for me to pursue. At that time Clara Ortega could not speak a word of English, but I brought her here to New York, where she had a companion for her—"

"An elderly lady, who has since died. I invested some money in Government bonds in her name, and in the case of accident to me she would be above want. So far as it has been possible, I have watched and cared for her ever since; I shall continue to do so as long as necessity exists. I can assure you that she is in every way worthy of your respect, even of your love. More than this I cannot tell you now. You must not ask me. The truth concerning her I have to reveal, even to you, Clara. Will you go with me to call on her?"

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could look down into the eyes of his fiancée.

"She returned the gaze steadily, still toying with the ring on her finger. But she did not reply to his question; instead, she asked one: 'Will you tell me concerning her?'"

"It is all that I can tell you, Clara," he said. "I should like to compare it with the other, for they are distinct. Duty is duty; it cannot be modified."

"Her eyes never left his face, and the question, though it made him catch his breath and pressed the iron into his soul, was uttered as calmly as the other, for they are distinct. Duty is duty; it cannot be modified."

"If I should make my faith in you dependent upon your telling me everything that you are keeping back concerning her, would you still retain the attitude you have taken? If my engagement depended upon your replying to certain questions that I should ask, would you still refuse to answer?"

He turned away and walked to the window, and for a moment looked out upon the street. Presently he returned and stood before her again.

"I should still retain the attitude I have taken," he said, deliberately.

"Clara withdrew the ring from her finger, slowly but certainly. It seemed reluctant to leave its resting place, and twice she hesitated. But at last the removal was effected."

"Then I must return this to you," she said, simply. "It's the only thing I can do under the circumstances. Perhaps I am unjust; if so, I cannot help it. Please take it, Morris."

He stretched out one hand slowly, and she dropped the ring in his palm. For a moment he regarded it intently; then idly let it fall into one of his pockets.

"As you will, Clara," he said, with a cold deliberation that belied the furious beating of his heart.

He bowed and turned toward the door. But before he had taken a step it was opened, and George Trevor entered the room.

"Ah, Morris," he said, "Smith told me you were here. I have just come in and I am very anxious to see you. I tried in vain to get you over the telephone this afternoon. His eyes fell on the photograph of Clara Ortega, and he bent over it. 'Hello! What's this?' he asked, carelessly."

He reached out and raised the photograph in his hand, and they saw him give a sudden and violent start. Then, with quick strides he went to the window, where the light was better, while with trembling hands he held the photograph so that he could scan it critically.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "No! It is impossible!" He turned the picture over and saw the name of the photographer on the back; then he studied the face again.

"It was taken here in New York and quite recently. No; it cannot be the same," he continued, uttering his thoughts aloud.

"Clara," he called suddenly, "whose picture is this?"

"It is a photograph of a friend of Morris," she replied.

"Who is it, Morris?" he demanded, still studying the picture face.

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"Her name is Clara Ortega; she is Spanish," Morris answered.

"Spanish, too?" muttered Trevor. "It is very strange—very strange!"

"Do you know who she is, papa? Have you ever met her?" asked Clara.

"No, no, certainly not," was the quick answer. "But she bears a striking resemblance to a lady whom I used to know years ago. She is very like, indeed—very like! How old is this girl, Morris?"

"About Clara's age," Lathrop replied, indifferently.

"And where does she live? Here in New York?"

"Will you lend me this picture till you come again?" the financier demanded. "I should like to compare it with one that I have. The likeness may not be so striking then. Will you lend it to me?" Without waiting for an answer, he whirled about and went out of the room hastily, bearing the picture in his hand.

"Is your decision unaltered, Clara?" Morris asked, when they were again alone.

"Yes."

The girl nodded in silence.

"He did not wait for more, but turned abruptly and walked from the room."

The Continuation of This Story Will Be Found in Tomorrow's Issue of The Times.

VASSAR STUDENTS AS SALVAGE CORPS

First Save Goods From Fire and Then Suffer From Shock.

POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y., Dec. 1.—Three hundred girl students at Vassar College are still suffering today from the shock of a fire panic caused by the destruction of the home of Prof. Treadwell, on the campus.

The fire started in Mrs. Treadwell's apartments, and spread rapidly throughout the building.

It soon burst into flames, and threatened the main college structure. The girls helped carry the goods from the burning house, and Mrs. Treadwell's jewels and clothing were saved after several narrow escapes.

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PRICES OF MEAT MAY SOAR AGAIN

Increase In Freight Rates, It Is Declared, Will Make This Sure.

OIL MEN ALSO HERE WITH THEIR PROTEST

Declared That Proposed Schedule Would Make Standard Oil Co. Omnipotent Again.

An emphatic warning of higher prices on meat products was given at the hearing before the Interstate Commerce Commission this morning, if the proposed freight rates increases go into effect as now planned by the railroads in the official classification territory.

Judge S. H. Cowan, of Fort Worth, Texas, representing the cattle growers of the Southwest, protested determinedly against the proposed advances on live stock from the West to the Eastern markets. He also declared that there was no justice in the proposed increase in the rates on packing house products.

The witness declared the movement to raise the dressed meat rates 10 to 20 per cent and the live stock rates 15 to 20 per cent meant in the first place that the cattle raisers could not send stock on the hoof to the East for slaughter. The price would be too high. In the second place the Western packers would suffer because of the unjust disparity in the amount of the increases on the two classes.

Will Raise Prices Everywhere.

The result of the proposed readjustment of rates, said Judge Cowan, would be higher prices for meat all over the country. Especially would this be true of the East, he said, where no slaughtering would be done. All live stock would have to be dressed near the section in which it is raised and this would confine the packing house business to Chicago and the Missouri river territory.

This would also mean lower prices for stock to the growers, said the witness. With the Eastern competition destroyed, the Western packers would be in a better position than now to control livestock prices.

F. W. Botts, traffic manager of the National Petroleum Company, appeared

And every one who reads this important announcement should know that Parisian Sage makes hair grow, not only abundantly, but gives it that lustrous appearance that all desire.

Women will find Paris